

IMPORTANCE OF SEABASING TO LAND POWER GENERATION

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by

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In 1954, Samuel P. Huntington reconsidered the classic strategies of naval warfare and urged the U.S. Navy to focus upon sea based support of land power generation (Seabasing), since it lacked a peer competitor on the high seas in the wake of World War II. Yet, over 50 years later, the U.S. Navy and Department of Defense are still struggling to clearly define Seabasing and overcome an array of difficulties that have stifled its development. This study defines Seabasing and its relevance to the classic strategies of sea power as well as the current National Security Strategies and Joint Military Doctrine of the United States. Seabasing has become increasingly essential to land power generation due to the decreasing number of nations willing to grant the U.S. overseas bases. Finally, this study discusses the challenges that have slowed development of Seabasing and concludes that Seabasing can only be developed efficiently and effectively if progressed in a truly joint and organized fashion. At stake is the ability of the U.S. to deter aggression and reinforce its foreign policy with credible and timely threats to potential adversaries and offers of assistance to allies located throughout the world.

IMPORTANCE OF SEABASING TO LAND POWER GENERATION

...The application of naval power against the land requires of course an entirely different sort of Navy from that which existed during the struggles for sea supremacy... For in a very real sense the sea is now the base from which the Navy operates in carrying out its offensive activities against the land...

—Samuel P. Huntington, 1954¹

Over fifty years ago, Samuel P. Huntington described the importance of transformation to military organizations in general and the U.S. Navy in particular in the *Proceedings* of the U.S. Naval Institute. Specifically, Huntington urged the U.S. Navy to transform itself into a land-focused force, since it lacked a peer competitor on the high seas in the wake of World War II. Otherwise, Huntington warned after reconsidering Alfred Thayer Mahan's classic theories of naval warfare, the Navy risked losing its "strategic concept" and public and political support for its continued development and growth.²

The rise of the Soviet Navy during the Cold War presented a new peer competitor and slowed development of sea based support of land power generation. However, the fall of the Soviet Union has renewed interest in "Seabasing."³ Once again, the U.S. lacks a peer competitor on the high seas and must reconsider its relevance to national security. The primary difference is that Huntington's advice has become even more relevant and important. In particular, Seabasing supports the National Security Strategies of the U.S. with mobile operational and logistics platforms that help offset the dramatic decline in U.S. access to overseas bases. These national security strategies require rapid access to potential Joint Operating Areas and

deployment of follow-on forces as necessary to deter potential aggressors and execute and reinforce U.S. Foreign Policy. In response, Seabasing allows the U.S. Navy to project military power on short notice anywhere in the globe either unilaterally or in support of Joint and combined operations. This eliminates the need to support marginally democratic regimes for fear of losing access to overseas bases or forcibly seize or establish marginally useful expeditionary air and sea ports. Rather, Joint Force Commanders can apply force directly to an objective at the time and place of their choosing from the relative safety of the high seas.

As a result, Seabasing has become a Joint Integrating Concept of great importance to all aspects of the U.S. Department of Defense. Specifically, Seabasing forms one of the “Pillars” of the “Sea Power 21” strategy to evolve the U.S. Navy from a “blue-water, war-at-sea” force to a “global joint operations” force, which is capable of confronting “regional and transnational dangers” on land as well as sea.⁴ Similarly, Seabasing is essential to transforming the U.S. Army and Air Force to a more responsive and truly joint force. Yet, over 50 years after Huntington first described its importance, the U.S. Navy and Department of Defense are still struggling to clearly define the goals and objectives of Seabasing and overcome the “mythology and misunderstanding” that has “stifled” its development.⁵

This study defines Seabasing and its relevance to the classic strategies of sea power as well as the current National Security Strategies and Joint Military Doctrine of the United States. As will be shown, Seabasing has become increasingly important to the land and air, as well as sea, services of the U.S. Department of Defense. In particular, Seabasing has become increasingly essential to land power due to the

decreasing number of nations willing to grant the U.S. access to overseas bases.

Finally, this study discusses the decisions and challenges that have slowed development of Seabasing and concludes that Seabasing can only be developed efficiently and effectively if progressed in a truly joint and organized fashion. At stake is the ability of the U.S. to deter aggression and reinforce its foreign policy with credible and timely threats to potential adversaries and offers of assistance to allies located throughout the world.

Definition of Seabasing

Put in its simplest terms, Seabasing consists of employing mobile seagoing logistics platforms to launch combat or humanitarian assistance forces far inland and sustain them indefinitely. Seabasing differs from amphibious warfare and Joint Logistics Over the Shore, which focus upon delivering personnel and material to an intermediate beachhead from ships anchored just offshore. Rather, Seabasing reflects recent initiatives to reduce the logistics footprint ashore⁶ and ensure Joint Force Commanders can establish and maintain direct access to potential Joint Operating Areas.⁷ A mobile flotilla of specially designed ships located just over the horizon about 25 miles offshore would support the “rapid deployment, assembly, command, projection, reconstitution, and re-employment of joint combat power from the sea” to forces located as far as 240 nautical miles inland “without reliance on land bases within the Joint Operations Area.”⁸

Specifically, Seabasing represents a sovereign and maneuverable staging area located in the relative freedom and safety of the high seas, which will support the following lines of operation when fully developed:

- CLOSE joint sea-based capabilities, including elements of Joint Command and Control, to a Joint Operating Area to support major combat operations within 10-14 days of an execution order;
- ASSEMBLE and integrate joint capabilities directly from the Seabase to support major combat operations within 24-72 hours of arrival within the Joint Operating Area;
- EMPLOY over-the-horizon from the Seabase at least one brigade for joint forcible entry operations within a period of darkness (8-10 hrs);
- SUSTAIN joint Seabased operations, including at least two joint brigades operating ashore, for an indefinite period using high-speed connecting air and sealift from advanced bases located up to 2,000 nautical miles away, and;
- RECONSTITUTE one brigade from ashore to the Seabase and reemploy it within 10-14 days of an execution order.⁹

While many components of Seabasing already exist, realizing its full potential will require developing or enhancing numerous additional capabilities over the next twelve years. Specifically, Seabasing will require new generations of amphibious assault and logistics ships, missile and anti-missile systems, aircraft, and logistics and communications systems.¹⁰ Figure 1 provides an overarching view of the relationship between these lines of operation and the anticipated capabilities of Seabasing.

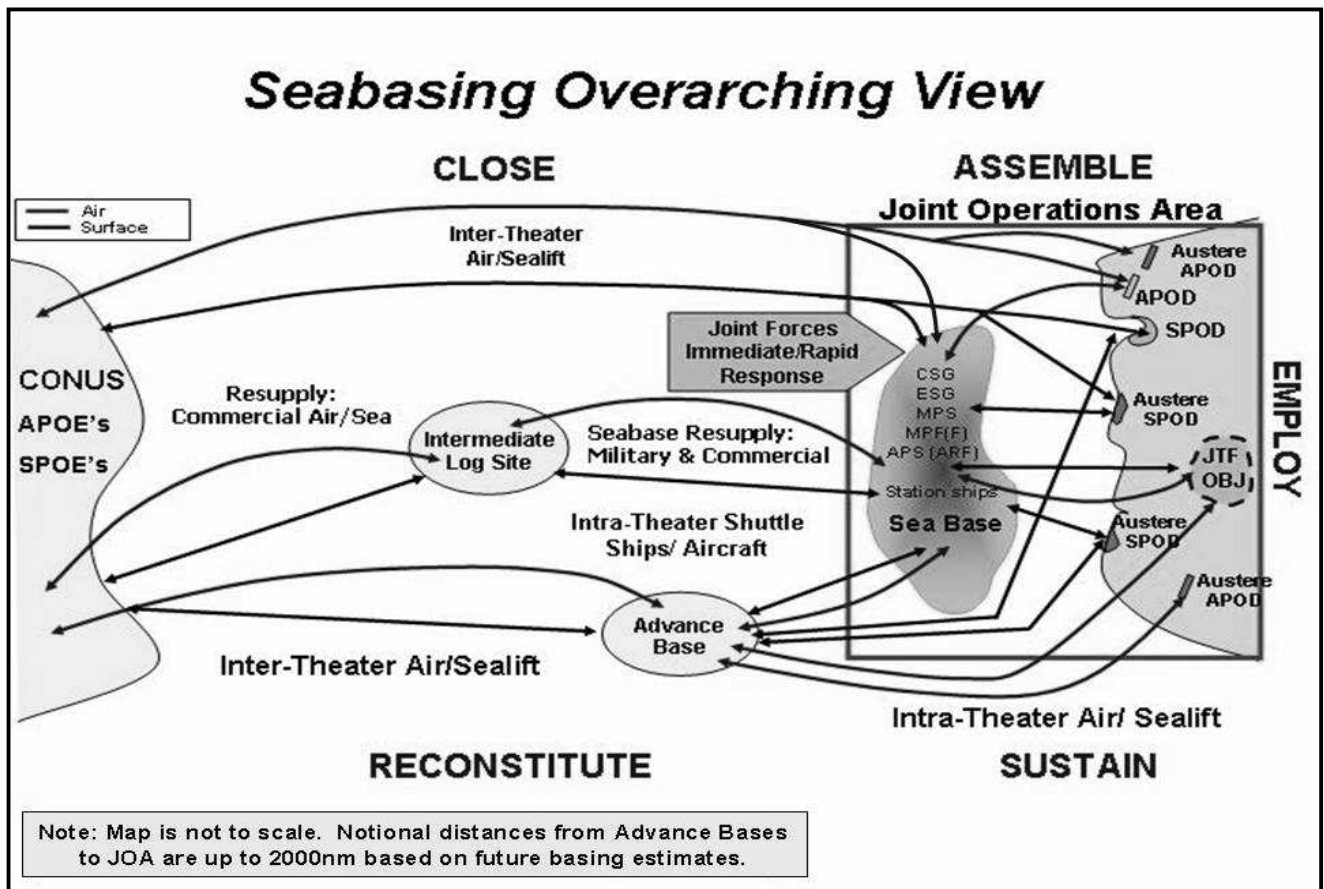


Figure 1. Seabasing Overarching View¹¹

In fact, Seabasing is actually part of a “system of systems” envisioned by the U.S. Navy in its *Transformational Roadmap*.¹² The U.S. Navy devised its *Roadmap* in response to the Joint Operating Concepts and six critical operational goals described in the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review. These overarching systems are commonly known as Sea Strike, Sea Shield, and Seabasing. The interconnected and reinforcing nature of these systems allow power projection from littoral seas located along continental areas anywhere in the world.¹³ Figure 2 depicts how the concept of Seabasing under the force protection of Sea Shield would enable the concept of Sea Strike as far as 240 nautical miles inland of a Joint Operating Area.

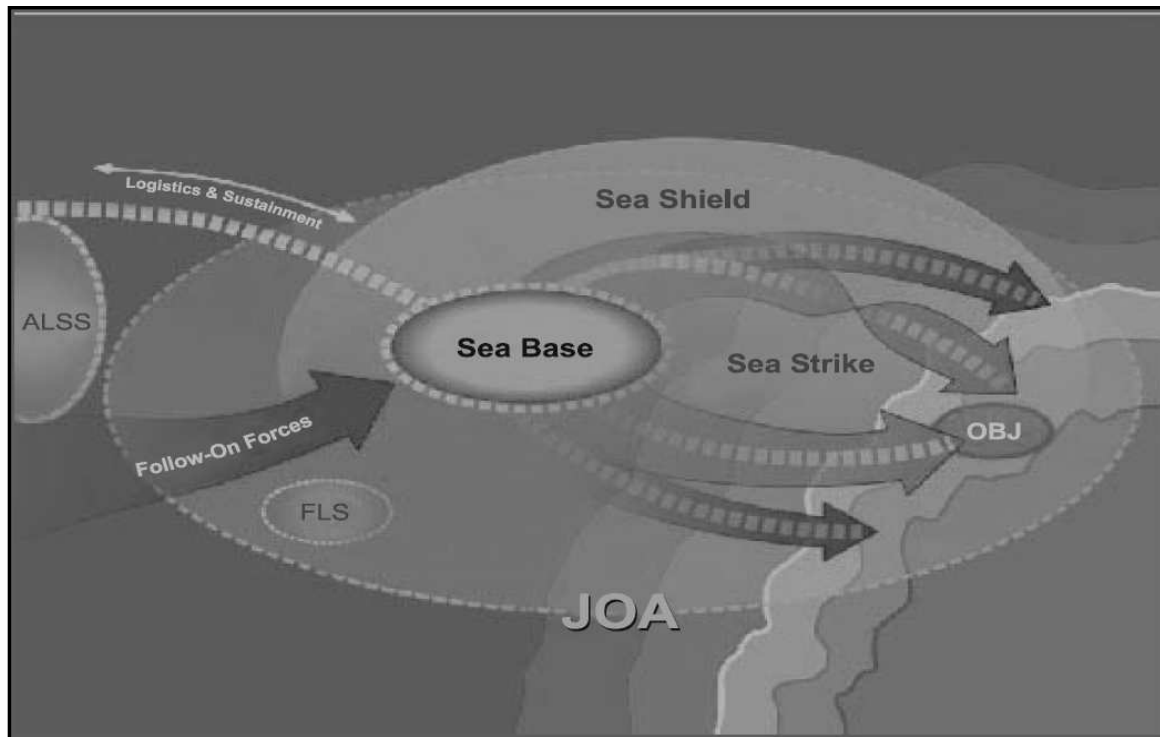


Figure 2. Seabasing Related Systems of Systems¹⁴

Definition of the Anti-Access Problem

Littoral areas have always offered opportunity for operational maneuver from the sea.¹⁵ However, they have become increasingly important as the number of overseas bases available to U.S. forces has steadily declined from 170 in 1945 to 26 in 2005.¹⁶ This loss of bases eliminates lines of operation, shortens operational reach, and makes U.S. foreign policy vulnerable to “anti-access” strategies designed to prevent the massing, employment and support of U.S. forces.¹⁷ More specifically, the anti-access problems consist of:

- Over flight restrictions: Countries, allied, neutral, and/or hostile, can refuse permission for U.S. aircraft to overfly their airspace;
- Base access problems: Governments can arbitrarily limit or deny the U.S. access to basing facilities often unexpectedly and at critical moments;

- Limited base infrastructure: Joint Operating Areas frequently lack deep-water, well-developed, and/or operational sea and air ports, particularly in developing areas of the world or the aftermath of natural disasters, and;
- Distorted foreign policy: The U.S. has frequently supported unpopular and undemocratic regimes to secure access to overseas bases at great cost to its prestige, credibility, and national budget.¹⁸

Seabasing seeks to overcome these threats with a floating base that can be rapidly assembled in the freedom of the high seas along any shore in the world. This eliminates the politics that frequently slow, limit, or prevent establishing land bases, places over 75% of the world's population within the 240 nautical mile reach of Seabasing, and describes the most important aspect of Seabasing to land power generation.¹⁹

Relationship of Seabasing to the Classic Strategies of Mahan and Corbett

Seabasing has renewed a longstanding debate between the theories of Alfred Thayer Mahan and Sir Julian Corbett regarding the proper role of sea power. Mahan first argued that naval influence extended far beyond protecting coastlines and ferrying troops to shore. Rather, according to Mahan, the true benefit of sea power is massing overwhelming force against decisive points at sea thereby controlling sea lines of communication according the principles of Carl von Clausewitz and Antoine-Henri Jomini. Specifically, Mahan proposed the primary purpose of naval strategy was concentrating and maneuvering fleets into collision with opposing fleets as necessary to control the seas and achieve national greatness and prosperity.²⁰ As a result, Mahan believed naval power to be of independent and preeminent importance as compared to land power.

Corbett stressed the limitations, as well as importance, of sea power. In particular, Corbett argued, sea power is of little use unless it influences affairs ashore. As a result, naval strategies must complement land strategies to “exert pressure” upon “the citizens and their collective way of life” and “internal” as well as “external” lines of communication.²¹ For example, during the Napoleonic Wars, England ruled the seas as a result of the decisive naval Battle of Trafalgar, but Napoleon continued to rule the continent for years thereafter. Corbett also preferred economy of force to massing fleets in search of decisive battles. In fact, Corbett argued, even the largest fleet cannot force an elusive enemy to accept battle on unfavorable terms. Instead, concentrating forces simply reduces overall control of the seas and the possibility of stealth and surprise. Thus, naval strategy should also include blockades, raids, combined operations and similar types of “strategic defense” and limited warfare.²²

Modern naval strategists generally preferred the theories of Mahan until World War II, which proved neither naval nor aerial warfare could solely defeat a determined enemy.²³ Since then, naval strategists have increasingly blurred the distinction between sea and land forces to a degree inconceivable by Mahan.²⁴ This reflects growing recognition that only land power can physically take and hold territory and secure long term success. In particular, “structures for reconstruction, stability operations, interagency and intergovernmental action, and sustainment of coalition resolve all take place on that element of geography where people actually work, farm, go to school, travel, and live—the land.”²⁵ Thus, strategic momentum began to swing toward the theories of Corbett beginning with analyses such as Huntington’s extremely influential *Proceedings* article in 1954.

Yet, debate regarding the strategies of Mahan and Corbett remain at the heart of Seabasing to this day. U.S. naval transformation since the fall of the Soviet Union has increasingly deemphasized battling opposing fleets on the high seas in favor of controlling the littoral regions of the world.²⁶ Many naval strategists, such as Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Admiral Michael Mullen, applaud this as a necessary and overdue step toward better aligning the U.S. Navy with the naval requirements of the developing world.²⁷ In fact, they argue U.S. defense policy still favors “blue water” capabilities over far more relevant “brown water” capabilities in support of maritime interdiction, projecting forces ashore, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations. Even the relatively large 400 foot length and 14 foot draft of the new Littoral Combat Ship of the U.S. Navy, they argue, is far too “blue water” to adequately support littoral operations.²⁸ This, proponents of Corbett argue, recognizes the “larger context” of a world without “great powers” for the U.S. to confront on the high seas.²⁹

Other naval strategists, such as Robert D. Kaplan, contend that while the U.S. has become “fixated on street fighting in Bagdad” the militaries of China, India, South Korea, Japan and Russia are quickly modernizing.³⁰ Thus, although the U.S. currently faces no peer competitor on the high seas, that will likely change over the next decade with China presenting the first serious threat.³¹ In fact, these strategists cite additional warnings by Huntington against retooling the U.S. Navy to primarily support ancillary missions such as humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and security cooperation.³² Most notably, critics cite how a recent joint publication by the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard entitled, *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*, “fails to acknowledge, much less discuss, China’s burgeoning maritime power and what that

might mean to the three sea services.”³³ As a result, proponents of Mahan argue that the U.S. Navy should continue focusing upon its “basic strategic function” of offering a “serious, inviolable instrument for inflecting great punishment” upon potential peer competitors on the high seas³⁴ and serving as America’s “first line of defense” against invasion.³⁵

Relationship of Seabasing to the National Security Strategies of the U.S.

Seabasing supports numerous aspects of America’s National Security, Defense and Military Strategies. This is best summarized by President George W. Bush recently declaring that the U.S. is “developing joint sea bases that will allow our forces to strike from floating platforms close to the action, instead of being dependent on land bases far from the fight.”³⁶ In particular, U.S. National Defense Strategy relies upon the “ability to rapidly deploy and redeploy forces” as the “keystone” of U.S. National Military Strategy.³⁷ Seabasing facilitates rapidly assembling and projecting the forces required to address any traditional, irregular, catastrophic and/or disruptive challenge and denies the sanctuary needed to plan attacks against the U.S. and develop weapons of mass destruction.³⁸ This directly addresses national objectives regarding “strategic access” to “retain freedom of action,” “strengthening alliances and partnerships” and establishing “favorable security conditions.”³⁹ Thus, Seabasing reassures our allies, helps deter and defeat potential adversaries, maximizes use of the “global commons” of the high seas, and ensures “timely generation and deployment of military forces” throughout the world.⁴⁰ This approach to force design and planning “focuses less on a specific adversary” and more on flexibly responding to how an “adversary might fight” at a nearly unlimited number of locations.⁴¹ Thus, the extremely flexible capabilities of Seabasing

are ideally aligned with the extremely flexible requirements of the National Security, Defense and Military Strategies of the United States.

Relationship of Seabasing to Joint Doctrine and Coalition Warfare

Tactically, Sea Basing capitalizes upon a long and highly successful tradition of amphibious warfare that integrated allied forces and stormed the beaches of Europe and the Pacific during WWII.⁴² Thus, as one might expect, Seabasing supports numerous aspects of U.S. Joint Military Doctrine. Specifically, Joint Publication 4-0 notes that logistics are the primary constraint upon operations. Thus, the most effective operations are most closely integrated with logistics, as is truly the case with Seabasing.⁴³ Similarly, Joint Publication 3-0 notes how “littoral areas often offer the best position from which to begin, sustain and support joint operations, especially in operational areas with limited or poor infrastructure for supporting U.S. joint operations ashore.”⁴⁴ Joint Publications 3-35 and 5-0 further cite the negative impact of “anti-access” strategies upon operational planning and benefit of dictating the timing and tempo of operations through U.S. dominance in areas such as sea and air power.⁴⁵ Finally, Seabasing supports many of the fundamental principles of war described by Joint Publication 3-0, including maneuver, mass, surprise, legitimacy, perseverance and security.⁴⁶ Specifically, Seabasing integrates “sea, land, air, space and cyberspace to a greater degree than ever before” in a way that projects “precise and persistent” power around the globe and turns “asymmetrical challenges” to our advantage.⁴⁷ In summary, the ability to strike from the relative security of the sea at the time and place of our choosing deters aggression and forces the enemy to defend its entire coastline against

an array of threats and moving targets.⁴⁸ This substantially increases the credibility of U.S. foreign policy and offers Joint Force Commanders a wide array of tactical options.

The North American Treaty Organization (NATO) supports Seabasing for similar reasons and has begun coordinating the Seabasing capabilities of its members.⁴⁹

Seabasing also eliminates many of the political obstacles that might complicate security cooperation by centering operations on the freedom of the high seas. For example, a recent Seabasing “proof of concept” exercise off the coast of Africa in March of 2008 demonstrated use of Seabasing to rapidly project humanitarian assistance into Liberia.⁵⁰

In addition, as recent events in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq have shown, Seabasing is essential to overcoming the limits of alliances and coalition warfare. Specifically, Seabasing is immune to the vagaries in alliances that have delayed recently operations for lack of access to overseas bases and/or airspace. For example, the \$26 billion that the U.S. nearly paid Turkey for access rights just before Operation IRAQI FREEDOM dramatically defines the value of Seabasing to land power generation.⁵¹ That alone would have paid for all of the new ships being requested by the U.S. Navy to support Seabasing. Thus, Seabasing is essential to supporting combined operations as well as providing the U.S. with options when its allies disagree with U.S. foreign policy and refuse to share their bases or airspace.

Importance of Seabasing to the Land Power Generation of Joint Components

Similarly, recent events in Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq have demonstrated the limits of air and sea power without adequate land power. Simply put, naval blockades and air strikes influence and interdict, but rarely achieve decisive victory. On the contrary, U.S. ground forces destroy, occupy, exert lasting influence, and communicate

the highest level of commitment and determination. “Thus, use of land power or potential use of land power” is typically “the decisive factor” in joint operations.⁵² Seabasing reinforces land power with viable options that potential adversaries cannot overcome with anti-access strategies.

For example, although the U.S. Army has historically deployed its forces by sea,⁵³ it “has built much of its logistical doctrine with the underlying assumption that logistics bases must be present worldwide.”⁵⁴ This is an increasingly invalid assumption given the increasing inability of the U.S. to safely station thousands of troops overseas. Rather, joint operations increasingly require rapid response to austere environments with little or no host nation support.

In response, the Transformation Plan of the U.S. Army calls for fielding a relatively light “combat-capable brigade anywhere in the world in 96 hours, a division in 120 hours, and 5 divisions in 30 days.”⁵⁵ Yet, the U.S. Army remains almost exclusively reliant upon the U.S. Air Force to for the rapid deployment of these forces. As a result, rapidly transporting a single medium Stryker Brigade would require securing a friendly aerial port of debarkation and nearly one-third of the C17 and C5 sorties of the U.S. Air Force over a period of 5 to 14 days. This timeline far exceeds the 4 days the U.S. Army desires and places unreasonable demands upon the U.S. Air Force. Thus, “Army officials now recognize that airlift alone will not be sufficient and that some combination of airlift and sealift will likely be used to deploy these brigades.”⁵⁶ Finally, current U.S. Army plans for sealift and pre-positioned materials still require friendly sea ports of debarkation to handle its relatively large deep-draft ships. This leaves the Army tied to

land bases and subject to counterattack during the “Vulnerability Gap” between the “Seize the Initiative” and follow-on “Exploitation” Phases of a joint operation.⁵⁷

Seabasing could do much to address U.S. Army requirements for access to Joint Operating Areas and expediting deployment thereafter. This will likely involve restructuring the current Strategic Flotilla, pre-positioned stocks, and some Brigade Combat Teams of the U.S. Army to support in-stream joint reception, staging, and onward movement from Seabases.⁵⁸ For example, the Army has achieved a 50% reduction in the deployment requirements of its Stryker Brigades.⁵⁹ In addition, Seabasing will require heavy lift aircraft capable of delivering up to 20 tons directly to an objective located up to 240 nautical miles inland⁶⁰ and Theater Aviation Sustainment Maintenance Facilities to provide the Air Cavalry of the U.S. Army with immediate access to depot level repairs.⁶¹

The U.S. Air Force is also heavily reliant upon a decreasing number of overseas air bases, which are becoming increasingly vulnerable to attacks. These bases are essential to supporting land power with the latest generation of short-range tactical aircraft.⁶² For example, limited air basing and/or over flight rights have adversely impacted at least twelve U.S. contingency operations since the late 1950s.⁶³ Seabasing offers alternatives to air bases and opportunities to develop new generations of heavy-lift short-range aircraft. As a result, the November of 2003 *Transformation Flight Plan* of the U.S. Air Force cites Seabasing as being essential to transformation within the U.S. Department of Defense.⁶⁴ Seabasing also offers an ideal platform for launching the latest generations of missile defense systems and unmanned aircraft. For example, the U.S. Navy and Air Force recently collaborated to successfully intercept an incoming

ballistic missile with an anti-missile system launched from an Aegis Cruiser.⁶⁵ Given the increasingly sophisticated capabilities of our potential adversaries, Seabased anti-ballistic missile systems will become increasingly important to defending joint forces as well as the homelands of the U.S. and its allies.

Beginning with the first U.S. amphibious landing overseas upon the “Shores of Tripoli” in 1803 and continuing to this day, the U.S. Marine Corps has been the longest and loudest advocate of the importance of Seabasing to land power generation.⁶⁶ In fact, Marine Expeditionary Units have become the “force of choice for Combatant Commanders” because of their ability to rapidly deploy up to 3,000 troops and 15 days of supplies to almost anywhere on the world. However, the U.S. Marine Corps still requires land bases to deploy larger forces and is frequently responsible for forcibly securing these bases at great cost to the lives of its members.

Thus, more than any other service, the U.S. Marine Corps views Seabasing as far more than just logistics.⁶⁷ Rather, the Marines view Seabasing as “operational maneuver from the sea.”⁶⁸ In particular, the “ship-to-objective maneuver” of Seabasing offers many advantages over traditional amphibious warfare. For example, land forces need not forcibly secure ports or endure the vulnerability of conducting joint reception, staging, and onward movement ashore.⁶⁹ In addition, the current Maritime Preposition Force that supports the U.S. Marine Corps typically requires deep-water ports and/or friendly airfields to land and sustain larger forces, such as a full Expeditionary Brigade of 17,000 Marines. When fully developed as part of Seabasing, a redesigned and expanded Maritime Preposition Force of the Future would deliver up to two Marine Expeditionary Brigades directly to an objective within days, rather than weeks.⁷⁰

Finally, Seabasing even improves joint integration with the capabilities of the U.S. Coast Guard, which has long recognized the importance of controlling littoral regions to affairs ashore. The primary maritime problems facing developing nations are piracy, smuggling, and preservation of natural resources. Thus, the U.S. Navy requires a strong littoral presence to help developing nations generate similar forces to protect its own coastlines. Specifically, the U.S. Navy must devote far more than 3% of its fleet to coastal patrol capabilities to serve as a meaningful mentor to the coastal defenses of developing nations.⁷¹

Recent Examples of Seabasing

U.S. joint and coalition forces have employed limited forms of Seabasing over the past few years with great success. The U.S.S. Kitty Hawk (CV 63) served as an Afloat Forward Staging Base for projecting Special Forces deep into Afghanistan during the initial stages of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM.⁷² Seabased forces were equally important to the initial stages of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM due to Turkey and Saudi Arabia denying access to its airspace and bases.⁷³ Seabasing was also critical to the U.S. response to the devastating tsunami of 2005, which literally erased ports located throughout the Pacific.⁷⁴ Similarly, Seabasing housed thousands of relief workers and provided the sole fully operational airfield in the Joint Operating Area during the U.S. response to Hurricane Katrina.⁷⁵

Additionally, recent military exercises and proofs of concept have demonstrated the viability and effectiveness of more advanced Seabasing capabilities. For example, recent exercises off the coast of Liberia demonstrated use of lighterage to selectively offload cargo in-stream and delivered fully mission capable assets directly ashore.⁷⁶

Similar demonstrations conducted along the West Coast of the U.S. proved the concept of constructing Mobile Landing Platforms and facilitating joint reception, staging, onward movement and integration of forces during heavy sea states.⁷⁷ To help develop littoral capabilities and coalition support, the U.S. Navy's "Global Fleet Station" recently visited Belize, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua and Panama and provided 39,890 hours of Security Assistance in the areas of leadership, small boat operations, port security and small unit tactics.⁷⁸ Finally, experience has dramatically improved the lives of Seabased forces deployed to protect the Iraqi oil terminals and addressed many of the concerns associated with Seabasing more than 17,000 troops at once off the coast of a Joint Operating Area.⁷⁹

Seabasing Challenges

Seabasing requires developing new classes of ships and aircraft to support staging operations during heavy sea states and deliver fully combat capable forces up to 240 nautical miles inland. This is the primary challenge for Seabasing since, as compared to its sister services, "the platforms which make up the U.S. Navy's fleet are extremely expensive, have much longer life-cycles, take years to build, and exhibit far less ability to be modified."⁸⁰ In fact, over 80% of the 288 ships of the U.S. Navy pre-date the Cold War and largely reflect its "blue water" planning and design.⁸¹ Recent ship designs have typically exceeded inflation by over 100% and taken far longer to complete than expected.⁸² For example, the U.S. Navy recently suspended construction of its third Littoral Combat Ship due to spiraling costs, which have jumped by over 86% from a planned \$220 million to between \$331 and \$410 million.⁸³ This is terrible news, since the Littoral Combat Ship is only one of several new designs

required to support Seabasing. Fully developing Seabasing would require approximately 14 additional ships, including new classes of amphibious assault and support ships and aircraft, at a likely cost of well over \$22 billion.⁸⁴ As a result, critics suggest an “all ahead slow” approach, which would develop new capabilities at a more rational and cost-effective pace.⁸⁵ For example, relaxing the immediate requirements to deliver a Joint Brigade to an objective within 10 to 17 days of an execution order and/or up to 240 nautical miles inland could reduce Seabasing costs by up to 80%.⁸⁶ Other analysts have suggested reinstating “Letters of Marque” as a cost effective means of recruiting privateers to help defeat pirates just as America did during the Revolutionary War.⁸⁷ More fundamentally, critics such as Thomas P. Barnett question if the world is truly “swamped” with failed states and “speed is everything” when responding to their problems. Instead, Barnett claims the “inevitability” of America’s “punishing power” is far more important than delivering a rapid response.⁸⁸

Other critics, such as Robert O. Work, contend current Seabasing proposals are far too Navy centric. Work contends the Seabasing Joint Integrating Concept began as a U.S. Navy initiative, continued as a U.S. Navy initiative and primarily “enables” rather than truly supports joint operations. Even the U.S. Navy failed to substantively discuss and define Seabasing in its recently published *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*.⁸⁹ Thus, Seabasing lacks a truly joint effort and clearly defined joint goals and objectives.⁹⁰ For example, U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Richard Meyers publicly “passed” on a question regarding Seabasing in 2005 due to his limited knowledge of its goals and objectives.⁹¹ Similarly, retired Major General Robert Scales, former Commandant of the United States Army War College, creator of the Army After

Next Program, and member of the Defense Science Board study on Seabasing, warns that Seabasing “cannot survive” as a primarily U.S. Navy initiative. Instead, Seabasing must clearly identify and market transformational concepts that the U.S. Army and Air Force cannot progress without Seabasing.⁹²

This lack of joint leadership has diffused Seabasing into a range of largely independent initiatives, which cross paths at annual conferences and cooperate when convenient. In particular, although the Joint Capabilities Integration Development System (JCIDS) has encouraged joint development of Seabasing, the services continue to “pursue their own initiatives.”⁹³ In fact, the U.S. Navy and Army are developing largely parallel and potentially complementing, competing and/or conflicting concepts.⁹⁴ For example, some U.S. Army sea based initiatives assume the Army can still rely upon friendly deep-water ports to offload its densely packed cargo.⁹⁵ This has caused the U.S. Government Accountability Office to repeatedly recommend establishing a “dedicated implementation team” for Seabasing in the U.S. Department of Defense to ensure its various initiatives are integrated and thoroughly evaluated against competing alternatives and priorities.⁹⁶ Others have flatly suggested Seabasing will “rely upon relationships more than technology” given the challenge of aligning the varied requirements of “Civilian mariners, Sailors, Marines, Airmen, and Soldiers.”⁹⁷ Thus, the head of the Joint Seabasing Team must possess “a sufficient number of stars” to encourage and sustain such relationships. Regardless, all agree current efforts are relatively ineffective for lack of joint planning and leadership.

Conclusions

This study reaches six conclusions regarding the importance and future of Seabasing. First, given America's increasingly limited access to overseas bases, Seabasing is essential to land power generation and will likely become even more essential throughout the 21st Century. Specifically, land power is of little use without access to the internal lines of communication that it seeks to sever and control. Seabasing provides the most efficient and effective means of placing boots on the ground, particularly in the increasingly frequent case where modern air and seaports are unavailable due to underdevelopment, devastation or anticipated losses. Rather, Seabasing allows applying force directly to an objective from the relative security of the sea.

Second, Corbett was right. The ultimate center of gravity of any opponent is its homeland and internal lines of communication. Sea and air power lack the direct and sustained influence required to achieve a decisive and lasting victory. Thus, historically, and for the foreseeable future, "imposing one's will on an enemy involves threatening the integrity of his state" by "threatening or conducting an invasion of his homeland."⁹⁸ Such "gun boat diplomacy" works best when one clearly has the ways and means to impose a desired end. Seabasing allows Joint Force Commanders to rapidly mass and move land power around the periphery of a continental opponent and attack at the times and places of their choosing. This clearly communicates the ability of U.S. forces to rapidly respond anywhere in the world. Nothing could be more important to deterring aggression against the U.S. and its allies and supporting American foreign policy.⁹⁹ Thus, Seabasing "is the most promising option available to national security planners,

both civilian and military, because it can achieve political purpose in a manner which most other joint capabilities cannot match.”¹⁰⁰

Third, while important, Seabasing cannot unreasonably detract from the U.S. Navy’s primary mission of dominating the high seas.¹⁰¹ As with the opposing strategies of Mahan and Corbett, the best strategy lies between the extremes of unreasonably ignoring or pursuing the benefits of Seabasing. As a result, overcoming the challenges facing Seabasing will require long-term planning, prioritization, patience, and persistence. For example, what are the true costs, benefits and alternatives to landing a full Marine Expeditionary Brigade anywhere in the world within 10 to 17 days instead of the current capability of 28 days? Perhaps the otherwise sound concept of Seabasing has been “hijacked” by narrowly focused requirements and an unreasonable quest for speed?¹⁰² For example, are realistic “top down” analyses or the maximum range of underlying systems, such as the MV-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft, driving the proposed 240 nautical mile range of Seabasing?¹⁰³

Thus, fourth, and most importantly, Seabasing requires a truly joint approach rather than the current U.S. Navy centric approach. Specifically, Robert O. Work calls consigning Seabasing to the JCIDS process under Navy leadership a “serious mistake.” Instead, Work suggests that a newly formed and truly Joint Project Office in the U.S. Department of Defense start with a “clean sheet of paper” and focus upon options offering the highest joint payoff.¹⁰⁴ For example, the departure of former U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld may ease the requirement for Seabasing to support an extremely, and perhaps unreasonably, rapid response to unexpected threats.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, joint planners must weigh the cost of Seabasing against the high cost and

negative political ramifications of maintaining overseas bases in countries with marginally democratic regimes.¹⁰⁶ At a minimum, the U.S. Government Accountability Office suggests Seabasing requires a “joint experimentation campaign” to provide the coordination and “conclusive and robust results” needed to drive a transformational concept like Seabasing to completion.¹⁰⁷

Fifth, the joint Seabasing team must help the U.S. Navy break its current “strategic dilemma” of glacial timelines and spiraling costs for delivery of new platforms. Rather than pressing for costly cutting-edge designs, which frequently become obsolete while being designed and deployed, many argue Seabasing can best leverage existing designs and/or platforms.¹⁰⁸ For example, perhaps expanding the U.S. Navy’s current fleet of relatively inexpensive Patrol Craft offers a far more efficient and effective investment than further developing its relatively expensive Littoral Combat Ships.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, why not retrofit rather than decommission otherwise obsolete ships such as aging aircraft carriers to support Seabasing?¹¹⁰ The U.S. Navy is already doing this with its Guided Missile Submarine (SSGN) Program by retrofitting portions of its otherwise excessive Ballistic Missile Submarine (SSBN) fleet to help project Special Forces and precision conventional missile strikes ashore in support of joint operations. This has given these otherwise obsolete platforms new life at a far lower cost than developing new platforms.¹¹¹

Sixth and finally, even the most vocal critics of Seabasing as currently conceived believe the basic concept is “very, very good.”¹¹² Thus, there is no question “if” Seabasing should proceed, but only “how” and “how fast” it should proceed.¹¹³ While other components need not be as fully Seabased as the U.S. Navy and Marines, they

must at least leverage Seabasing to reduce reliance on overseas bases and improve access to Joint Operating Areas. Thus, the U.S. must pursue joint Seabasing as a means of deploying, employing and sustaining land power generation as well as interagency and multinational capabilities from the sea. To do this, the joint team need only fully and finally define the “strategic concept” of Seabasing first described by Samuel P. Huntington way back in 1954 using the “timeless” strategies of Mahan and Corbett as a guide.

Endnotes

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¹⁰⁵ David W. Munns, "Forward Progress," *Sea Power* (September 2005); available from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3738/is_200509/ai_n15352410/print?tag=artBody;col1; Internet; accessed 4 January 2009.

¹⁰⁶ Chalmers Johnson, "737 U.S. Military Bases = Global Empire," book excerpt published on Alternet.org; available from <http://www.alternet.org/story/47998>; Internet; accessed 02 January 2009. Johnson estimates the overall value of U.S. overseas bases to be at least \$127 billion using Pentagon figures from 2005.

¹⁰⁷ U. S. General Accounting Office, *Force Structure: Joint Seabasing Would Benefit from a Comprehensive Management Approach and Rigorous Experimentation before Services Spend Billions on New Capabilities*, 17.

¹⁰⁸ See the "Seabasing Challenges" section of this study for specific examples and further discussion regarding the "spiraling costs" of developing U.S. Navy platforms.

¹⁰⁹ Raymond Pritchett, "Strategic Sea Basing Enables Fleet Constitution Evolution," 5 May 2008; available from <http://informationdissemination.blogspot.com/2008/05/strategic-sea-basing-enables-fleet.html>; Internet; accessed 4 January 2009. Pritchett hosts an Internet "Blog" entitled "Information Dissemination, Observations of an Armchair Admiral" under the Internet pen name of "Galrahn." The author exchanged E-mails with Mr. Pritchett and received permission to cite his real name. Pritchett has never served in the military and truly is an "Armchair Admiral." However, he has gained a widespread following on the Internet as a result of his insightful postings.

¹¹⁰ Mogg, 35. Mogg specifically suggests using decommissioned aircraft carriers as Seabasing platforms.

¹¹¹ Rita Boland, "Special Operations Forces Dive Deep," *Signal Online*, May 2006 [journal on-line]; available from http://www.afcea.org/signal/articles/templates/SIGNAL_Article_Template.asp?articleid=1124&zoneid=182; Internet; accessed 4 January 2009.

¹¹² Jean.

¹¹³ Till, 53.

